

VZCZCXRO8957
PP RUEHAST
DE RUEHBW #1063 1860805
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 050805Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8935
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 1155
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
RXFEAA/HQ AFSOUTH NAPLES IT

UNCLAS BELGRADE 001063

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SR](#) [MW](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: GOS ASKS FOR OUR SUPPORT WITH UNESCO

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Serbian Presidential advisor Ambassador Dusan Batakovic requested UNMIK and Contact Group support for the GOS effort to name three Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo as UNESCO protected buildings during the bodyQs July 8 Q 16 meeting in Vilnius. Batakovic expressed his hope that this protection and other assurances for the Kosovo Serbs will deter their exodus if Kosovo becomes independent. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Advisor to President Tadic and member of the GOSQ Kosovo status negotiating team Ambassador Dusan Batakovic told poloff on June 27 that he hopes UNMIK and the Contact Group countries will support the GOSQs effort to name three Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo as UNESCO protected buildings during the bodyQs July 8 Q 16 meeting in Vilnius. These sites are:

- the Pec Patriarchate;
- the Gracanica monastery;
- the Cathedral Church in Prizren.

¶3. (U) Batakovic said the plan is Qof utmost importanceQ to Serbia and is a way of protecting the Qmost important 14th century buildings in southeastern EuropeQ and said he expected no objection from Albanians. In fact, he said the Albanians would gain from having UNESCO sites Qregardless of outcomeQ of Kosovo status talks as the religious sites would be sources of tourism revenue. Batakovic clarified that the intent is to protect only the buildings, not the lands around them, and said this is identical to how the Decani monastery was included in July 2004. He added that he did not expect the GOS to request protection by UNESCO for any other sites in Kosovo in the future.

¶4. (U) While he did not expect opposition to this plan in Vilnius, the sheer number of other sites from around the world up for consideration requires the GOS to solicit support from member nations to ensure the Kosovo sites are included. As a result, he mentioned he had asked Acting SRSG Schook for UNMIKQs support and that the GOS would be sending a letter to Contact Group foreign ministries requesting the same. He said a joint letter from the Contact Group to UNESCO would be an excellent show of support for this initiative, and believed that the USG was the only Contact Group member on the UNESCO board.

¶5. (SBU) Turning to Kosovo status, Batakovic said that the UNESCO request along with ongoing decentralization plans are part of a larger effort to ensure the future of Serbs in Kosovo. Kosovo Serbs are QshakenQ due to recent violence against Serbs (he noted the Klina shooting in particular as a Qpolitical killingQ to make Serbs flee) and said they are not seeing any tangible results from the negotiations. Prime Minister KostunicaQs June 28 trip to Kosovo in honor of Vidov Dan (the 1389 Battle of Kosovo), Batakovic said, was intended to show Kosovo Serbs that Belgrade is committed to them. Batakovic said that the deputy head of the Russian Duma participated Qpurely as an Orthodox representative.

¶6. (SBU) Regarding the June 20 UNSC meeting, Batakovic said that outgoing SRSG Petersen's report was inaccurate and did not reflect ground realities for Serbs. He confessed that CCK President Raskovic-Ivic's report could have been more conciliatory but reflected more accurate statements.

¶7. (SBU) Ultimately, Batakovic said that Kosovo Serbs desperately need progress to remain in Kosovo, especially on a decentralization plan which will survive any settlement in Kosovo's final status. He said he only wants for Serbs in Kosovo to have the same as Albanians in Serbia or Macedonia.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: As we have heard from the President's office for months, Batakovic's statements reflect forward-looking intentions limited by a paralyzing fear of the consequences of losing Kosovo. Batakovic said you saw what happened to Djindjic when he took on Milosevic, which was a small issue compared to Kosovo. We would of course welcome USOP's views on this issue, but, from our vantage point, we see no reason not to support the GOS plan to add these historic sites to the UNESCO list -- especially if this can be constructed as a joint GOS-PISG effort similar to the recent Returns Protocol. END COMMENT.

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